

MRSA Prevention SFMS February 19 2006
By Adlen W. Robinson

In March 2005, Francine Jackson took her son C.J. to the doctor to have a potential spider bite examined. The wound was red and irritated and seemed to be infected. An otherwise perfectly healthy child, C.J. was given an antibiotic and sent home. Two months later, after several seemingly unrelated doctor visits for problems with ingrown toenails and muscle pains, Jackson found herself kneeling at the hospital bed of her son praying that C.J. would live. During this hospitalization, C.J.'s fever reached as high as 107 degrees. As the proficient hospital nurses plunged her son in ice baths, Jackson was painfully aware that her son was fighting for his life. Still, nobody seemed to know what was making C.J. so very ill. "For several days, nobody knew what was wrong," remembered his mother. "It was not until an infectious disease specialist walked in and ran some tests that they determined C.J. had MRSA."

MRSA is the acronym for Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus aureus bacteria. MRSA is a strain of the more common Staphylococcus aureus bacteria that has mutated and become resistant to commonly used antibiotics. In the past, MRSA was found almost exclusively in hospitals. In recent years, the potentially deadly bacteria is becoming increasingly prevalent in "regular" communities like Forsyth County.

Once the correct diagnosis was made, C.J. was given an antibiotic that has proven effective against the potentially deadly bacterial infection. After eight months on medication, C.J. has made a full recovery. Even so, Jackson is quick to say that her approach to her children's illnesses is now forever changed. "I learned that knowledge is power---especially when you consider the results could have turned out so much worse."

"If I had of known about MRSA then, I would have insisted the doctor do a simple culture," explained Jackson. "The culture would have shown he had it, and then he could have taken the correct antibiotic."

Perhaps the reason that so many people have never heard of MRSA, is that it usually begins with something as innocent as a scratch or an ingrown toenail. "Prevention can be summed up by saying careful hygiene," said Jackson. "We are targeting the athletic community because that is where sometimes basic hygiene can be neglected."

"The facts are that once it gets into your bloodstream, MRSA can be deadly." Using her family's experience combined with her expertise in marketing, Jackson teamed up with Theresa Drew, whose 21 year old son Ricky Lannetti lost his life to MRSA in 2003. Lannetti, who was a star football player at Lycoming College, was preparing for an important game that had the potential to lead to a national championship; the senior was admitted to the hospital with a blood infection. Ricky Lannetti died that night from MRSA.

"Our goal is to raise public awareness---we want children and their parents to be aware so that they know what to look for and have the information they need to prevent serious illness and possibly even death," stressed Jackson.

C.J.'s friends and fellow students at South Forsyth Middle School were not content to sit idly by after they learned what had happened to their classmate. "The other kids wanted

to get involved and do something to help,” said Jackson. So, the resourceful 7th graders decided to do several fund raiser projects and with the money they earned, the students did a mass mailing of information to 150 middle and high schools in Forsyth and surrounding counties. “The students really did everything---they researched to find schools, they organized the fund raisers, and now they have an assembly line to stuff envelopes and make sure all of the information gets to the various schools they are targeting,” explained Jackson.

For C.J., raising awareness about MRSA is obviously a cause that is close to his heart. “After going through this, I just want other kids to know what it is, and how they can prevent it,” explained the articulate 13-year old. “I think a lot of times kids tend to listen to other kids even more than they listen to adults---so we are all trying to spread the word.” Cameron Garrison, one of the 7th grade MRSA awareness activists, said “Before this happened to C.J., I had never even heard of this before---we just want to let people know because we do not want any other kids to get sick or to die from this.”

“I am a strong believer in fate,” said C.J.’s mother when asked about why she thinks this happened to her son. “There are so many things I do not know the answer to, but I know for sure that if I can help raise awareness so another mother does not have to see her child so sick or lose her child, then all of our efforts are worth it.”

For more information about MRSA and how you can help, visit www.mrsaawareness.com

Avoiding MRSA:

- Thorough cleansing after workouts and contact with other players.
- Utilize alcohol-based hand sanitizers during workouts and games.
- Launder your uniforms and other athletic clothing in hot water and dry them with a hot dryer.
- Any athletic equipment must be thoroughly sanitized after use to avoid transmission of bacteria; a MRSA can live for days on surfaces.
- If you have an open wound, be sure to clean it well, and keep it covered with a bandage that attaches to the skin on all sides.
- Do not ever share or borrow towels, razors, soap or any other personal items.

Symptoms of MRSA:

- Rashes, boils, or ingrown hairs---often occurring in the area of the armpits, groin, neck, and buttocks where Staphylococcus bacteria colonize and thrive.
- Unexplained fever, muscular pain and/or fatigue, especially in the several months following a skin infection.

